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ABSTRACT

As part of the Federally sponsored School Program Advancing Career Education (SPACE) in the schools of Greeneville and Greene County, Tennessee, a student interest inventory was conducted to aid in assessing a 45 percent dropout rate in the county. A 25-statement questionnaire (concerning occupational/career interests, communication skills, and work attitudes) was administered to 320 students in one rural elementary school, grades 1-8. A random sampling, equally representing all grade levels and both sexes, of 160 children was used. Some interpretations of the interest inventory responses were that girls and boys in grades 1-8 enjoy building things, working with their hands, engaging in activities involving other people, listening to music, and drawing. A majority of the girls and boys had career aspirations, desired to attend college, visualized themselves in a variety of careers, and had positive work attitudes. The girls in the study visualized themselves as capable of entering previously designated male-oriented careers. Girls also showed more enthusiasm about reading and writing, a more positive attitude toward arithmetic, and a greater liking for school than their male peers. The author offers recommendations based on the study that pertain to curriculum, career information, career exploration, and teaching activities. (EA)

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INTEREST INVENTORY OF 160 RURAL STUDENTS IN GRADES 1 THROUGH 8

INTRODUCTION

The School Program Advancing Career Education (SPACE) in nine pilot schools of Greeneville and Greene County, Tennessee was an effort to develop a comprehensive program in career education. Funded under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the planning phase lasted from January to October, 1973 and involved approximately 3,500 students in grades 7 - 12 and 130 administrators and teachers.

A dropout rate of 45 percent made it imperative to find new methods for motivating students to remain in school. Educators decided that innovations must be introduced into the curriculum. These innovations must be designed to create enthusiasm and interest in learning, thereby stimulating young people to continue their education.

Furthermore, determining grades where students were likely to become disenchanted with school was important. By ascertaining the levels where young people found school to be undesirable, intense efforts could be made to improve content and instruction at that particular point.

The construction of a comprehensive vocational school which was in progress offered an additional solution to educational problems encountered in the area. This school promised to open new doors for exploring occupations and preparing for a variety of careers. However, implementing new types of instruction was considered to be of primary importance.

THE PROBLEM

If an effective career education program is to be developed, the interests of students must be determined. Once they are pinpointed, instruction can be developed that is closely related to these interests.

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were stated for this study:

1. To determine the interests of students that can be related to instruction;
2. To determine some of the career interests of students at various levels;
3. To determine the levels where the development of communication skills is considered unenjoyable;
4. To determine the levels where students develop disinterest in school; and
5. To determine student attitudes toward work itself.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

A 45-percent dropout rate in Greene County impelled educators to search for ways to maintain student interest in school. Because early leavers create an additional burden upon society due to their inability to enter employment and become productive citizens, it is essential that methods be found to keep them in school where they can prepare for careers that lead to self-fulfillment.

By determining the areas of interest which students have at various levels, instruction can be developed which meets their needs and desires, thus stimulating them to stay in school where their greatest potential can be developed.

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ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumptions were made in regard to this study:

1. Career education offers the best solution to reducing the high rate of dropout frequently experienced in today's schools.
2. The dropout rate can be decreased by implementing instruction closely related to the interests of students.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Because of the short time span, the study was conducted in only one of the nine pilot schools involved in SPACE. These limitations applied:

1. The questions in the interest inventory may possibly have been interpreted in various ways by respondents.
2. Due to the wide range of reading abilities, the questionnaire was given orally. In addition, it was kept simple and brief to eliminate restlessness and lack of concentration upon the part of students.

METHODOLOGY

A 25-statement questionnaire was prepared which included items concerning activities around which career-related instruction could be developed. This instrument also encompassed questions relating to communication skills, career interests, and attitudes toward work. The questions were designed to cover occupations selected from the 15 occupational clusters designated for career education by the U. S. Office of Health, Education, and Welfare. The occupations chosen were those which could be prepared for and entered within the county.

The respondents replied affirmatively or negatively. Frequencies, percentages, and rank were determined.

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FINDINGS

In June, 1973, the interest inventory was administered to the total population of 320 students at Debusk, a rural elementary school. From this group of 320 students, 10 questionnaires for the boys of each grade and 10 questionnaires for the girls of each grade were selected at random. In all, 160 questionnaires were used.

Interests of Girls

Interest in building things was indicated by girls at all levels; 100 percent of the females in grades 4, 5, and 6 were affirmative about this question. A majority of the girls also stated interest in working with their hands. Activities involving interaction with people were considered desirable by 100 percent of the girls in each grade. The majority of females in all grades also stated that listening to music, singing, and drawing were of interest.

Over two-thirds of the females at each level stated that they knew what they would like to be when they grew up. At least 50 percent or more of the females in each grade indicated that they would like to attend college except in grade 6 where only 33 percent of the girls were affirmative about college attendance.

In considering occupations which they would like to enter, Table 1 shows those which girls selected as most important.

Interests of Boys

Boys at all levels indicated interest in building things; 100 percent of the males in grades 3, 4, 6, and 7 were positive about this question. Similarly, a majority of the boys at all levels were also interested in

TABLE 1
OCCUPATIONS RANKED MOST IMPORTANT BY 80 FEMALES
IN GRADES 1 - 8

Grade	Percentage	Occupation
1	100 100	Cosmetologist Gardener
2	85 85 85	Truck Driver Gardener Factory Worker
3	94	Teacher
4	92	Cosmetologist
5	67 67	Doctor Television Station Worker
6	100	Doctor
7	86	Store Clerk
8	83	Store Clerk

working with their hands. Activities involving people were considered desirable by a majority of boys in all grades. Listening to music was deemed a worthwhile pastime by a majority of males at all levels. However, although a majority of boys in grades 1, 2, and 5 indicated that singing was of interest, less than 50 percent of the males in grades 3, 4, 7, and 8 agreed. Drawing was evaluated as worthwhile by a majority of boys at all levels.

One-half of the males in grade 5 indicated that they held career aspirations; however, more than two-thirds of the boys in other grades stated that they had such aspirations. Over 50 percent of the group indicated a desire to attend college except those in grades 6 and 7.

Table 2 shows those occupations which boys selected as most important.

TABLE 2
OCCUPATIONS RANKED MOST IMPORTANT BY 80 MALES
IN GRADES 1 - 8

Grade	Percentage	Occupation
1	81	Truck Driver
2	85	Teacher
3	100	Builder
4	75 75	Truck Driver Office Worker
5	79	Truck Driver Builder
6	71	Factory Worker
7	67 67	Truck Driver Builder Factory Worker
8	100	Truck Driver

Communication Skills

A majority of boys enjoyed reading except in grade 7 where 50 percent of them indicated that they did not enjoy this activity. Second-grade boys were most enthusiastic about reading; 100 percent of them agreed that reading was fun.

Similarly, a majority of girls considered reading pleasurable except in grade 6 where 83 percent of them stated that they did not like to read. However, girls were generally more favorable toward reading than boys.

Girls enjoyed writing more than boys except in grades 2 and 3; second-grade boys were more positive about writing than their female peers. At grade 3, a majority (60 percent) of both groups stated that writing was enjoyable. Writing was least enjoyed by girls (67 percent) and boys (85 percent) in grade 6. Eighth grade boys (100 percent) stated that they disliked this activity.

A majority of the girls enjoyed arithmetic until grade 5 when affirmative response dropped to 17 percent. One-half or more of the females continued to dislike arithmetic through grade 8.

Boys in grades 2 and 6 enjoyed arithmetic the most. Over three-fourths of the males in grades 7 and 8 indicated that they disliked this subject.

Interest in School

In grades 1 and 2, almost 100 percent of both girls and boys were positive about liking school. However, in third grade, 47 percent of the females and 60 percent of the males indicated that school was not enjoyable. Interest continued at a low level except when positive response was indicated by 83 percent of the girls in grade 7 and 85 percent of the boys in grade 5. Eighth grade males (100 percent) agreed that they did not like school.

Table 3 shows the percentage of girls and boys who liked school.

Attitudes toward Work

Girls and boys were positive about liking to work at home. In only one instance did affirmative response fall below 50 percent; i.e., 46 percent of first-grade boys stated that they liked to work at home.

TABLE 3

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PERCENTAGE OF 160 STUDENTS LIKING SCHOOL IN GRADES 1 - 8

Grade	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	6 %	7 %	8 %
Girls	100	100	53	42	50	50	35	83
Boys	81	100	40	37	85	15	17	0

When asked if "it is good to work," over 75 percent or more of both groups at all levels responded positively.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are based upon an interpretation of the data gathered in this study:

1. Girls and boys in grades 1 - 8 like to build things, work with their hands, and engage in activities involving other people.
2. Girls and boys at the elementary level enjoy listening to music and drawing. However, girls enjoy singing more than boys.
3. Career aspirations are held by a majority of girls and boys at the elementary level.
4. A majority of girls and boys in these grades have a desire to attend college.
5. Girls and boys at the elementary level visualize themselves in a variety of careers.
6. Girls in elementary school see themselves as capable of entering careers which have been previously designated as suitable for males only.

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7. Girls in these grades are more enthusiastic about reading and writing than boys. Although not generally favorable toward arithmetic, girls are more positive than boys about this subject.

8. Girls in grades 1 - 8 like school more than their male peers.

9. Girls and boys in grades 1 - 8 hold positive attitudes toward work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been made as a result of this study:

1. Career activities involving the community should be implemented in grades 1 - 8. Numerous activities involving manual work resulting in useful creations or products should be included in the curriculum.

2. Many opportunities to listen to various kinds of music and sing should be provided for all students.

3. Projects involving art should be readily available to all girls and boys.

4. Career information and hands-on activities related to careers should be introduced into the curriculum at all levels. Resource persons from the community should be encouraged to contribute toward the development and implementation of these.

5. Career centers should be developed in each classroom by the teacher, students, and community members. The centers should be maintained by the students under the guidance of the teacher. A variety of printed and audiovisual materials related to careers should be available to all students.

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6. Students should be motivated to improve attendance and achievement by involving them in career activities with community members. An intensive effort should be made to increase interest in school for girls in grades 3 - 7 and boys in grades 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8.

7. Career exploration should be planned with guidance from the staff of the vocational school. All elementary students should have numerous opportunities to visit the vocational facility and observe occupations in action.

8. Major emphasis should be placed upon field trips which provide career exploration experiences. Community members should be encouraged to lead these trips.

9. Girls should have opportunities to explore careers which have been labeled "for men only."

10. A variety of reading materials should be placed in each career center. Special efforts should be made to interest seventh grade boys in reading. Projects should be planned by seventh grade teachers and interested community members to stimulate these students to read. Career-related materials suitable for a wide range of abilities should be provided. Students should be given a choice in selecting materials which appeal to them. This same effort should be made to interest sixth grade girls in reading.

11. Students should have time and freedom of choice to explore any occupational cluster or career that interests them. Improvement of communication skills should be encouraged by reading, discussing, or writing about these areas of interest.

12. Students should be motivated to write by introducing career projects from which they may choose. Community members may provide the impetus to involve students in library research about a particular career.

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Students may then describe their findings and opinions in writing. Special efforts should be made to motivate sixth grade girls and boys as well as eighth grade boys in this direction.

13. Class assignments should emphasize discussion and written reports about activities and careers which students find of interest.

14. The types, benefits, and contribution of work that students do at home and at school should be discussed and used as the basis for written and oral reports.

15. The principal, teachers, and students should work cooperatively with the community to develop an active list of community participants who will assist with career activities.

INTEREST INVENTORY FOR STUDENTS IN GRADES 1 - 8
(Administered Orally)

1. Do you like to build things?
2. Do you like to work with your hands?
3. Do you like to work with people?
4. Do you like to listen to music?
5. Do you like to sing?
6. Do you like to draw?
7. Do you like school?
8. Do you enjoy reading?
9. Do you enjoy writing?
10. Do you like arithmetic?
11. Do you like to work at home?
12. Do you know what you would like to be when you grow up?
13. Do you want to go to college?
14. Would you like to be a teacher?
15. Would you like to work in an office?
16. Would you like to be a doctor?
17. Would you like to make things in a factory?
18. Would you like to drive a truck?
19. Would you like to build a house?
20. Would you like to fix hair?
21. Would you like to work in a garden?
22. Would you like to be a clerk in a store?
23. Would you like to work in a television station?
24. Would you like to run a hotel?
25. Do you think it is good to work?